

# FLESH

BY REX BEACH

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHARLES SARKA

**S**HOULD YOU CHANCE, in traveling a certain mountain pass in Southern Catalonia, to find yourself poised above a little arid valley, against the rim of which lies a monastery, look to the heights above it. Should you piece out from among the rocks the jagged ruins of a castle, ask its name. Your guide will perhaps tell you that those blackened stones are called "The Teeth of the Moor," and if he knows the story he will cross himself; but in all probability, he will merely shrug his shoulders and tell you nothing. For even among the learned monks of the valley, the term is one of mystery; and while, to be sure, they know that once upon a time the castle harbored a haughty Moslem, they have long since forgotten the story of Joseph, the Anchorite, who sought flesh within its portals and found it. Also, why "The Teeth of the Moor" came to grin down at them with baleful ferocity through all these many years. Time was, however, when the tale was fresh; and it runs this wise:

Away back in the reign of Abderamus, the Just, First Caliph of the West, Hafiz, a certain warlike Moor, amazed at the fertility of the plateau, established there a stronghold of surprising security. Perched upon the crest of the cliff and overlooking the sandy valley, it was backed by verdant, sun-kissed slopes which yielded tribute in such quantity as to render him rich and powerful. Hafiz lived and fought and died beneath the Crescent banner, leaving in his place a son who likewise waged war to the northward in behalf of the Prophet and all True Believers.

Generations came and went, and steadily the power of the hated Christians grew. Situated thus upon the fringe of the Mussulman Empire, the descendants of Hafiz beheld with consternation the slow-creeping advance of the Unbelievers. At times, these enemies of the Faith were driven back; but in years of peace they reappeared. Then, at length, upon the plain beneath the castle, monks came and built the monastery of San Sebastian. Beneath the very eyes of Abul Malek, fourth descendant of Hafiz, they raised their impious walls; and while he chafed to seek a bloody vengeance for this outrage, the Moorish nation had sought respite from her interminable wars, and peace dozed upon the land. Men sought from the earth new strength, with which to wage the never-ending struggle between the Crescent and the Cross; and Abul Malek, from his em-

brasured windows, beheld the cassoaked enemies of his creed pass to and fro in security, heard the hour of prayer desecrated by Christian bells, and could do no more than revile the dogs and await the will of Allah.

But the truce seemed never to be broken. Years passed; the Moor fed upon his wrongs, and became possessed of a fanatical fury that took strange ways of showing itself.

He was learned, brave and polished; but being a believer in the True Religion, he kissed the blue blade of his scimitar and cursed the shackles that hampered him. At one time, he summoned all his followers, and selecting from their number one hundred of the finest horsemen, he bade them make ready for a journey to Cordova. For many days there was the bustle and confusion of a great preparation; men came and went, women sewed and cleaned and burnished; horses were groomed, their manes were combed and their hoofs were polished; and then one morning, ere the golden sun was an hour high, down the winding trail past the monastery of San Sebastian, came a brilliant cavalcade. Abul Malek led, upon an Arabian steed, whiter than the clouds which lay piled above the westward mountains; his two sons, Hassam and Elzemah, followed astride horses black as night, the distinguished pedigrees of which were cited in the books of Ibn Zaid; and back of them came one hundred swarthy warriors, on other coal-black mounts, whose flashing sides flung back the morning rays. Their flowing linen robes were like the snow, and from the turban of their leader gleamed gems of priceless value. Each horseman bore at his girdle a purse, a kerchief and a poinard; and in these purses lay two thousand dinars of gold. Slaves rode behind, upon asses laden with bales, leading fifty blood red bays caparisoned as for a tournament.

With scowling glances at the monastery, the band rode on across the valley, climbed to the pass and disappeared. After many days they came to Cordova, and when they had rested and cleansed themselves, Abul Malek craved audience of the Caliph, Aboul-Abbas El Hakkam. Being of distinguished reputation, his wish was quickly granted; and in the presence of the Hadjeb, the viziers, the white and black eunuchs, the archers and cuirassiers of the guard, he made a gift to the sovereign of his hundred northern horsemen and their mounts, his fifty blooded bays and their housings, his bales of aloe wood and camphor, his silken pieces and his two thousand dinars of Catalonian gold. Then he humbly craved a favor, and told of the indignities done him by the monks of San Sebastian.

"Five generations my people have dwelt upon their lands, serving the true God, and His Prophet," he declared; "and now these idolaters come to gibe and mock beneath my very window. A pack of hounds is whelping at my easement, and my prayers are broken by their yammerings; the stench assails my nostrils."

"What do you ask of me," enquired the Caliph.

"I ask for leave to cleanse my doorstep."

The illustrious Moslem shook his head, whereat Abul Malek cried:

"Does not the Koran direct us to combat the unbelieving and the impious? Must I then suffer these infidels to befoul my garden?"

"God is merciful; it is His will that for a time the Unbelievers shall flourish," said the Caliph. "We are bound by solemn compact with the Kings of Leon and Castile; our land is weary of wars, our men are tired, and their scars must heal. It is not for you or for me to say: 'This is good, or this is evil.'"



He spat at the belfried roof of the monastery beneath

Abul Malek and his sons returned alone to their mountains; but when the Moor reined in at his door, he spat at the belfried roof of the monastery beneath.

Now that the Law forbade him to destroy his enemies by force, he canvassed his brain for other means to effect their downfall; but every day the monks pursued their peaceful tasks, unmindful of his hatred. His venom passed them by, and they gazed upon him with gentle eyes in which there was no spleen. As time wore on, his hatred of their religion became centered upon the monks themselves, and he undertook by crafty means to annoy them. Men said these Christian priests were good; that their lives were spent in prayer and meditation and works of charity among the poor. Tales came to the Moor of their spiritual existence, of their fleshly renunciation; but at these he scoffed.

"Pah!" he cried, tugging at his midnight beard. "How can these men be aught but liars, when they live and preach a falsehood? Their creed is impious, and they are hypocrites. They are flesh, like you or me. They have our passions and our faults; but a thousand times multiplied, for they dwell in darkness. Beneath their cassocks is a depth of infamy; their hearts are full of evil—aye, of lust—of every unclean thing. Being false to the true God, they are false to themselves, and to the religion they profess; and I will prove it."

In order to make good this boast, he began to study the monks one after another. He tried temptation. A certain gross-bellied fellow, he plied with wine. He flattered and fawned; he led the simple friar into his cellars, striving to poison his mind as well as his body; but the visitor partook in moderation, and preached the Gospel of Christ so earnestly that the Saracen fled from his presence, bathing himself to be rid of the pollution.

Next, he laid a trap for the Abbot himself. He selected the fairest of his slaves, a well-rounded woman of great physical charm, and bribed her with a girdle of sequins. She sought out the Abbot, and professed a hunger for his creed. Bound thus by secrecy to the good man, she lured him by every means at her command; but he had room for no passion save the love of Christ, and her wiles were powerless against this armor.

But Abul Malek was patient, and renewed his vow to hold the false religion up to ridicule and laughter, thinking by encompassing the downfall of a recluse, thus to advertise his triumph far and wide. He became



"I, too, have sung these songs," he panted



obsessed by this idea; he schemed and he contrived; he brought the utmost powers of his Oriental mind to bear. Like a spider, he spun his web; and when one monk broke through he craftily repaired its fabric, luring another into its meshes. From his vantage point above the cloister, he heard them droning at their Latin; his somber glances followed them at their daily tasks.

At times, he shared his vigil with his daughter Zahra, a girl of twelve, fast growing into womanhood; and since she had his wit, he taught her to share his hatred of the black-robed men.

This maiden possessed the beauty of her mother, who had died in childbirth; and in honor of that celebrated favorite of Abderamus III, she had been christened "Ornament of the World." Nor was the title too extravagant, as all men who saw her vowed. Already the hot sun of Catalonia had ripened her charms, until neighboring lords had made overtures of marriage; but her father saw in her a weapon more powerful than any he had launched as yet against the monks of San Sebastian. So he kept her at his side, and poured his hatred into her ears until she was ablaze with it.

It was in her fourteenth year that Abul Malek beheld one day a new figure among those in the courtyard of the monastery below. Even from his eminence, the Saracen could see that the latest comer was a giant man, towering head and shoulders above his brethren. Enquiry told him that the fellow's name was Joseph. Nor was he long delayed in meeting this strange monk; for a sickness fell among the people, and Abul Malek, being skilled in medicine, went out to minister among the poor, according to his religion. At the sick-bed of a shepherd, the two men came face to face.

Joseph was not young, nor was he old, but in the perfect flower of his manhood; and his soul looked out through placid features of unusual strength and sweetness. But the crafty Moor beheld in him a difference. While the other monks had once been worldly men and showed it in their faces, the countenance of Fray Joseph was that of a boy, without track of temptation or trace of evil upon it. He had lived a sheltered life of godliness from youth, it transpired; and Abul Malek rejoiced. For it was his belief that all men are flesh, and that within them smoulder flames which some day must have mastery. If this monk had never let his youth run free, those pent-up forces which inhabit us all must be gathering power, year by year; and once the joint of this armor had been found, he would become earthly, like other men, and his false religion would drop away like a rusted coat of mail, leaving him writhing at the irksome bonds of priesthood.

The Moor tested him accordingly, as he had tested the Abbot and the others, but without avail; and he was in despair, until one day the secret was unexpectedly revealed.

Being busied with his accounts, he had repaired to the shade of a pomegranate grove near the cliff, the better to escape the heat, when, up the path from the monastery came the good brother. Just abreast of Abul Malek's point of vantage, Joseph paused as if to listen. A bird was trilling wondrously, and the monk's face, raised toward the pomegranate trees, was rapt and transfigured. He was changed as if by magic; his lips

were parted in a tender smile; his figure was tense with listening, and not until the notes had ceased did the priest move. Then a great breath stirred his lungs, and with shining countenance he went on into the fields.

Abul Malek rose, with his white teeth gleaming through his beard.

"Allah be praised!" he exclaimed. "It is music!" And rolling up his papers, he went into his house.

Early on the following morning, another cavalcade filed down past the monastery of San Sebastian; but this time it was far different from the one that had gone by five years before. Instead of gaily caparisoned warriors, it was composed mainly of women and slaves, with only a handful of guards to lead the way.



Across the wide floor waged the contest; but the mighty priest was irresistible

There were bondmaidens and seamstresses, an ancient nurse and a tutor of languages; while astride of a palfrey at her father's side, rode the youthful lady of the castle. Her veil was wet upon her cheeks, her eyes were filled with shadows; yet she rode proudly, like a princess.

Once more the procession moved past the sunbaked walls of the monastery, across the plain and to the southward pass that led through to the land of bounty and of culture; and late that afternoon, Brother Joseph learned from the lips of a herdsman that the beautiful Zahra, flower of all the Moorish race, had gone to Cordova to study music.

## II

ABUL MALEK once more rode home alone to his castle; but this time, as he dismounted at his door, he smiled at the monastery beneath.

Four years crept by, during which the Saracen lord brooded over the valley and during which the monk Joseph went his way, rendering service where he could, preaching by the example of his daily life a sermon more powerful than his lips could utter. Through it all, the Moor watched him carefully, safeguarding him as the wise farmer fattens a sheep for the butcher. Once a year the father rode southward to Cordova, bringing with his return news that delighted the countryside; news that even penetrated the walls of San

Sebastian, and filled the good men with gladness. It seemed that the maiden Zahra had become a wondrous musician. She pursued her studies in the famous school of Ali-Zeriab, and not even Moussali himself, most gifted of Arabian singers, could bring more tender notes from the lute than could this daughter of Catalonia. Her skill transcended that of Al-Farabi; for the harp, the tabor and the mandolin were wedded to her dancing fingers; and, most marvelous of all, her soul was so filled with poetry that her verses rang from Valencia to Cadiz. It was said that she could move men to laughter, to tears, to deeds of heroism, and even lull them to sleep by the potency of her magic. She had once played before the Caliph under amazing circumstances.

The Prince of True Believers, it seemed, had quarrelled with his favorite wife, and in consequence had fallen into a state of melancholy so deep as to threaten his health and alarm his ministers. Do what they would, he still declined, until the Hadjeb sent for Zahra, the daughter of Abul Malek. She came, surrounded by her servants, and sang before El Hakkam; and so cunningly did she contrive her verses, so tender were her airs, that all within hearing were moved to tears, while the unhappy lover became so softened that he sped to the arms of his offended beauty and a reconciliation occurred. He had dispatched a present of forty thousand drachms of gold to the singer, and her renown went broadcast like a flame.

Abul Malek praised his God, and gathering his horsemen, set out to bring her home; for at last the time was ripe.

One evening in the early spring, when Nature is most charming, Fray Joseph returning to his cell heard, from a screen of verdure close beside his path, a woman singing. But was this singing? Could mortal lips give birth to melody like this? It was the sighing of a summer wind through rustling leaves,

the music of crystal brooks on stony courses; and the monk listened enthralled, like a famished pilgrim in the desert. His simple soul, attuned to harmonies of the woodland, leaped in answer; his fancy, starved by years of churchly rigor, quivered like a prisoner at the light of day. Not until the singer ceased did he resume his way, and in his cell that night he heard the song of birds, the play of zephyrs, and the laughter of bubbling springs. A few evenings later he heard the voice again, and paused with lips apart, with heart consumed by eagerness. It was some slave girl busied among the vines of Abul Malek, he decided; for she

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## THE DIVIDED SKIRT

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change all this, gentlemen! Now the free rivalry of the sexes will begin; the divided skirt against the trousers. We demand freedom for our limbs. We will move unimpeded, as you do. The walking prison of the gown was all very well for the past, the bondage of woman, the harem life of woman."

"Only, it is worthy of note that the woman of the harem has always worn trousers."

The little lady looked perplexed, and the professor took advantage of the opportunity.

"Your interpretation of the trouser problem is clever, Madame; but historically it is scarcely accurate. Woman's costume is no invention of man, he has not condemned woman to wear it, and its object is not to chain woman to her home. These things have a totally different connection. With regard to the clothing of mankind, two principal types may be found in their garments. One of these originated in the temperate and cold, and the other in the warm and tropical climates. I will briefly term them the polar and the equatorial types. The polar costume is intended to keep in the warmth of the body, and to prevent the penetration through the material of the cold, outside air. It closely encases the body and the limbs, and provides special coverings for the arms and the legs. The equatorial costume, on the contrary, is planned to admit air to the body; it does not shut out the refreshing breeze, but the heat of the sun. It is wide and flowing. It hangs around the form; but does not cling closely to it. It displays the figure, not by its cut, but at the utmost by the thinness and softness of the material. Its beauty consists in its flowing lines and its drapery. In both these types, there existed originally no difference in the form of costume for either sex, save in the matter of ornaments and general daintiness. The civilized nations of ancient times, all of whom wore the equatorial costume, had the same garments for the man and the woman—among the Greeks, the *chlamys* and the *peplos*; among the Romans, the tunic; among the Assyrians, the plaited robe; among the Egyptians, the apron-like skirt. Even at the present day, among the Bedouins and Tuaregs, so far as they have not yielded to European influences, men and women, except for immaterial differences, are clad in the same way. On the other hand, the polar costume is the same for both sexes. The Lapp and Esquimaux ladies wear trousers and sleeved jackets, like their husbands. The Roman and Greek representations of the barbarian women show that the ancient German and Celtic dames also went through life in trousers. Among modern civilized nations, we now observe the noteworthy phenomenon that the feminine garb follows the equatorial, the masculine the polar type. Why?"

"Why? Why?" asked four voices in the same breath.

"I have my own hypothesis in explanation of this singular fact. I assume that, at the end of the ice period, Northern peoples with the polar type of clothing came down from the high latitudes to the south; and that on the migration they

suffered from a lack of wives. They met in the warm regions races clad in the equatorial fashion, and robbed them of their women. These retained with their new lords their hereditary ample, flowing equatorial garments, as the men kept their tightly fitting ones, with trousers and sleeves. With the persistence characteristic of woman, she has preserved all this time, probably ten thousand years, her equatorial costume, which renders it possible for us to conjure up a pre-historical drama."

"That is, a Rape of the Sabine Women?" observed the hostess.

"That's it, Madame," replied the professor. "The divided skirt, therefore, would be no novelty; rather, it would be a return to an ancient type of clothing, the last consecration of the victory of the northern men over the southern nations, the final subjection of the women of the conquered races to the victors, the giving up of the last memento of the deeds of violence by which our remote ancestors seized upon more beautiful, more alluring wives than their own."

The little lady became very thoughtful. "If the divided skirt should mean subjection—"

"Then it will please you only half as well," the hostess mischievously completed the sentence.

"Oh, learning is not infallible, not even the professor's!" the little lady objected.

"Subjugation or rebellion," said the Breton aunt authoritatively, "the divided skirt, in any case, is abominable."

"Madame," said the professor gallantly, "permit me to answer in the words of King Ferdinand of Naples. When his Minister of War proposed to give a blue uniform to his soldiers, who, hitherto, had worn red, the sovereign answered: 'My dear Minister, dress the fellows in red, or dress them in blue, they will still desert!' Even so, I should like to say: 'Dress the women in divided skirts, or dress them in clinging gowns; dress them in any way you choose, they will always be charming.'"

"Bravo!" cried his masculine comrade. "This little poem, which I beg permission to read aloud, will show how entirely I agree with your opinion."

The faces of his listeners lengthened slightly; but without seeming to notice it, he drew out his little note-book and read:

## EROS TYRANNOS.

"Look at this scarecrow; its head a pot doth bear,

Turned upside down upon the frowsy hair. In supple stuff confined, we see the waist; Beneath, it runs a turnip point into,

Hobbling along upon a high-heeled shoe, A scoff at beauty, custom, and good taste!

And yet this monster, silk and velvet clad, We neither laugh to scorn, nor do we jeer;

Charming it seems, it maketh our eyes glad,

By this, O Eros, doth thy power appear!"

The ladies glanced at each other. They did not know whether to smile approvingly, or to pout.

## FLESH

(Continued from Page 13)

translated all the fragmentary airs that float through summer evenings—the trill of mating birds, the croon of distant waterfalls, the voice of sleepy locusts—yet weaving the whole into an air that carried words.

He felt a strange desire to mingle his voice with hers. But he knew his throat to be harsh and stiff from chanting Latin phrases; likewise, he knew not whither the tune would lead. Yet, when she sang, he followed, realizing gladly that it was the familiar music of his soul. He was moved to seek her out, until he remembered with a start that she was a woman and he a priest.

Each night he shaped his course to bring him past the spot; and in time his breast was stirred by a very earthly curiosity, the which he manfully fought down. Through the long, heated hours of the day he repeated her verses, longing for the twilight hour which would bring this angel voice from out the vineyard. In time, the song grew into one of love, and Joseph began to hum the words in solitude, his voice as rasping and untrue as that of a frog. Then, one evening he heard that which froze him in his tracks. It was the sound of some instrument, the like of which he had never dreamed of. The music filled the air with heavenly harmony, which set him to vibrating like a tautened string; it rippled forth softer than the breeze, more haunting than the perfume of the frangipanni. Joseph stood

as in a trance, forgetful of all things save these honeyed sounds, half minded to believe himself favored by the music of the seraphim.

Never had he imagined the existence of such harmony. And then, as if to multiply his wild exultation, the maiden sang a yearning strain of love and passion and desire.

The priest began to tremble. His heart became unbridled; something new awoke within him, and he was filled with fever. His huge thighs tightened and his muscles swelled as if for battle, yet he was melting like a child in tears. With his breath tugging at his throat, he turned from the path and parted the verdure, going as soundlessly as an animal; and all the while, his head was whirling, his eyes took note of nothing. He was drawn as by a thousand invisible strings, which wound him toward the singer.

But suddenly the music ended in a peal of girlish laughter and the swift rustle of silken garments. Fray Joseph found himself in a little open glade, so recently vacated that a faint perfume still lingered to aggravate his nostrils. Beyond, stretched the vineyard of the Moor, a tangle of purpling vines, into the baffling mazes of which the singer had fled.

So, she had known of his presence all along, the monk reflected dizzily. It followed, therefore, that she must have waited every evening for his coming, and hence her songs must have been aimed at

The modern poets are said to be the Ad-writers; study them.



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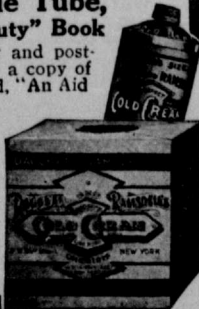
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him. An ecstasy swept over him, and regaining the path he went downward to the monastery, his brain afire, his body tingling.

He was far too simple for self analysis; he was too enchanted by those liquid strains to know what all this soul confusion foretold; he merely realized that he had made the most amazing of discoveries, that the music of the spheres had been translated for his privileged ears, that a door had opened allowing him to glimpse a glory hidden from all other mortals. It was not the existence of the singer, but of the music, that excited him to adoration. He longed to cherish it, to take it with him like a thing of substance, and worship it in his solitude. The song had been of love, and love was the burden of his religion; only now, it had a quickened meaning. Love filled the universe, it kept the worlds aswimming; it was the thing that dominated nature and made his rigid life so sweet. It was love which awoke this fierce yet tender yearning, that seemed like to smother him. Love was a holy and impersonal thing, blazing and melting in his every vein.

Through all that night Joseph, the Anchorite, lay upon his couch, rapt, adoring, thankful. But in the morning he had changed. His thoughts became unruly, and he recalled again that tantalizing perfume, the shy tones of that mischief laughter. He began to long intensely to behold the author of his ecstasy, just to behold her once; for his imagination had graced her with a thousand witching forms. He wished ardently, also, to speak with her about this miracle, this hidden thing called melody, for which he had hungered all his life, unknowingly.

As the afternoon wore on, he began to fear that he might have frightened her, and when he came to mount the path it was with a strange commingling of eagerness and dread. But he heard her singing, as usual, while still at a distance, and nearing the spot he remained to drink in her message. Again she sang of love; again he felt his spirit leaping; again she fed his starving soul as adroitly as she fingered the vibrant strings. At last her wild romantic verses became more unrestrained; the music quickened until, regardless of all things, he burst the thicket asunder and stood before her, huge, exalted, palpitant.

"I, too, have sung those songs," he panted. "That melody has lived in me since time began; but I am mute. And you? Who are you, then? What miracle bestowed this gift—?"

He paused, for with the ending of the song his frenzy was dying and his eyes had cleared. There, casting back his curious gaze, was a bewitching Moorish maid whose physical perfection seemed to cause the very place to glow. The slanting sunbeams shimmered upon her silken garments; from her careless hand drooped a golden instrument, strange to the eyes of the monk. Her feet were cased in tiny slippers of soft Moroccan leather; her limbs, rounded and smooth as ivory, were outlined beneath wide flowing trousers, which were gathered at the ankles. A tunic of finest fabric was flung back, displaying a figure of delicate proportions, half recumbent now upon the sword.

The loveliness of Moorish women has been heralded to the world, and it is not strange that this maid, renowned even among her own people, should have struck the rustic priest to dumbness. He stood transfixed; and yet he wondered not, for it was seemly that such music should spring from the rarest of mortals. He saw that her hair, blacker than the night, rippled in a glorious cascade about her whole form, and that her teeth embellished with the whiteness of alabaster the vermilion lips which were smiling at him.

That same intoxicating scent, sweeter than the musk of Hadramaut, engaged his nostrils; her fingers were jeweled with nails which gleamed in rivalry with their burden of precious stones, as she toyed with the whispering strings.

For a time, she regarded the monk silently.

"I am Zahra," she said at length, and he thrilled at the tones of her voice. "To me, all things are music."

"Zahra! 'Flower of the world,'" he repeated wonderingly. After an instant, he continued harshly, "Then you are the daughter of the Moor?"

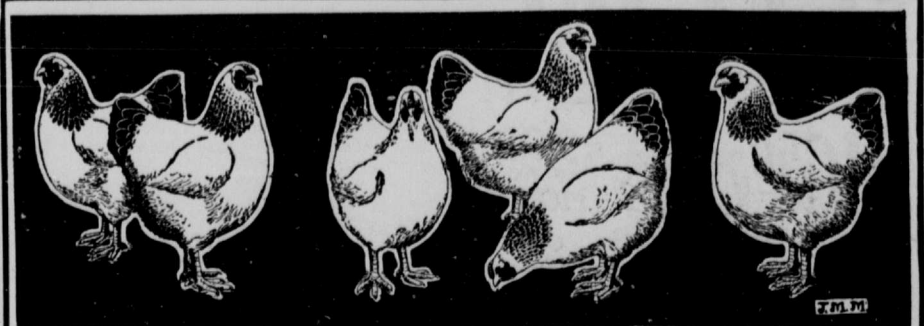
"Yes, Abul Malek. You have heard of me?"

"Who has not? Aye! You were rightly called 'Flower of the world.' But—this music! It brought me here against my will; it pulls at me like straining horses. Why is that? What strange chemistry do you possess?"

She laughed lightly: "I possess no magic art. We are akin, that is all. You, of all men, are attuned to me."

"No," he said heavily. "You are an Infidel; I am a Christian. There is no bond between us."

"So? And yet, when I sing you can hear the nightingales of Aden; I can take



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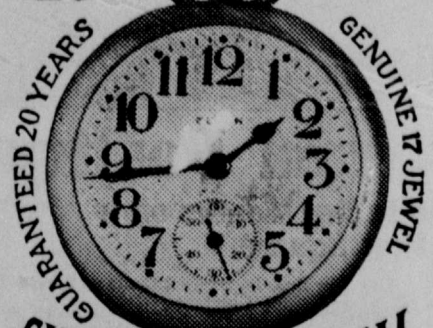
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you with me to the fields of battle, or to the innermost halls of the Alhambra. I have watched you many times, Brother Joseph, and I have never failed to play upon your soul as I play upon my own. Are we not, then, attuned?"

"Your veil!" he cried accusingly. "I have never beheld a Moorish woman's face until now."

Her lids drooped, as if to hide the fire behind them, and she replied, without heeding his words:

"Sit here, beside me. I will play for you."

"Yes, yes!" he cried eagerly. "Play! Play on for me! But I will stand."

Accordingly, she resumed her instrument; and o'er its strings her rosy fingers twinkled, while with witchery of voice and beauty, she enthralled him. Again she sang of love, reclining there like an houri, fit to grace the paradise of her Prophet; and the giant monk became a puppet in her hands. Now, while she sang of love, it was a different love from that which Joseph knew; and as she toyed with him, his hot blood warred with his priestly devotion and he was racked with the tortures of the pit. But she would not let him go. She lured him with her eyes, her lips, her luscious beauty, until he heard no song whatever, until he no longer saw visions of spiritual beatitude; but flesh, ripe, quivering and awake.

At last a cry burst from him, and turning he tore himself away, crashing blindly through the thicket like a bull pursued. On, on he fled, down to the monastery and into the coolness of his cell, where, upon the smooth, worn flags he knelt and struggled with this evil which accursed his soul.

For many days he avoided the spot which had witnessed his temptation; but of nights, when he lay worn and weary with his battle, through the grating of his window came the song of the Saracen maid and the whisper of her golden lute. She was calling to him, yet he beat his breast and scourged himself to cure the agony. Night after night she sang from the heights above, and the burden of her song was ever the same, of one who waited and of one who came.

Bit by bit she drew him up through the groves of citron and pomegranate, into the grapefields; time and again he fled. Closer and closer she lured him, until one day he touched her flesh—woman's flesh—and forgot all else. But now it was her turn to flee.

She poised like a sunbeam just beyond his reach, her bosom heaving, her lips as ripe and full as the grapes above, her eyes inviting him. In answer to his cry she made a glowing promise, subtle, yet warm and soft, as of the flesh.

"Tonight, when the moon hangs above the pass, I shall play on the balcony outside my window. Beneath is a door, unbarred. Come, for I shall be alone in all the castle, and there you will find music made flesh and flesh made music." Then she was gone.

If the soul of the priest had been in torment heretofore, it was as nothing to the chaos that engulfed him during the hours that followed. He was like a man bereft; he burned with fever, his whole frame shivering as from a wintry wind; he prayed, or tried to; but his eyes beheld no vision save a waiting Moorish maid with hair like night. His stammering tongue gave forth no Latin; but repeated o'er and o'er her parting promise: "There you will find music made flesh and flesh made music."

He knew the foul fiend had him by the throat, and undertook to cast him off; but all the time he realized that when the moon came, bringing with it the cadence of a song, he should go, even though his path led to perdition. And go he did, groveling in his misery. His sandals spurned the rocky path, as he heard her voice sighing through the branches; then, as he came out beneath the castle walls, he saw her bending toward him from the balcony.

"I come to meet you," she whispered; and an instant later, her form showed white against the blackness of the low stone door. There, in the gloom, for one brief instant, her yielding body met his, her hands reached upward and drew his face down to her own; then out from his hungry arms she glided, and with rippling laughter fled into the blackness.

"Zahra!" he cried.

"Come!" she whispered. "Do you fear to come?"

"Zahra!" he repeated; but his voice was strange, and he tore at the cloth that bound his throat, stumbling after her and guided only by her words.

Always she was just beyond his reach; always she eluded him; yet never did he lose the perfume of her body nor the rustle of her silken garments. Over and over he cried her name, until at last he realized from the echo of his calling that he had come into a room of great dimensions and that the girl was gone.

For an instant he was in despair; then her voice reached him from above.

"I do but test you, Priest. I am waiting."

"Flower of the World," he stammered hoarsely, "Whence lead the stairs?"

"And do you love me, then?" she queried, in a tone that set him all ablaze.

"Zahra," he repeated, "I shall perish."

"How do you measure this devotion?" she insisted softly. "Will it cool with the dawn, or are you mine in truth forever and all time?"

"I have no thought save that of you. Come, Light of my Soul, or I shall die."

"Do you then adore me above all things, earthly and heavenly, that you forsake your vows? Answer, that my arms may enfold you."

He groaned like a man upon the rack, and the agony of that cry was proof conclusive of his surrender.

Then, through the dead black silence of the place, there came a startling sound. It was a peal of laughter, loud, evil, triumphant; and as if it had been a signal, other mocking voices took it up, until the great vault rang as if to the din of fiends.

"Ho! Hassam, Elzemah! Close the doors," cried the great voice of Abul Malek. "Bring the lights."

There followed a ponderous clanging and the rattle of chains, the while Joseph stood reeling in his tracks; then suddenly, from every side, burst forth the radiance of many lamps. Torches sprang into flame, braziers of resin wood began to smoke, flambeaux were lit, and half blinded by the glare, the Christian monk stood revealed in the hall of Abul Malek.

He cast his eyes about; but on every side he beheld grinning men of swarthy countenance, and at sight of his terror the hellish merriment broke forth anew, until the whole place thundered with it. Facing him, upon an ornamental balcony, stood the Moor; and beside the latter, with her elbows on the balustrade, her face alight with the same sinister enjoyment, was his daughter.

Stunned by the frightful suddenness of it all, the monk pronounced her name, at which a fresh guffaw resounded. Then she enquired, with biting malice:

"Thinkest thou still, O Christian, that I adore thee?" Whereat her father rocked back and forth, as if suffocated by the humor of this jest.

The lone man turned, as if to flee; but every entrance to the hall was closed, and before each stood a grinning Saracen. He raised his shaven head, and his shame fell slowly upon him.

"You have me trapped," he said. "What shall my punishment be?"

"This," answered the Moorish lord; "to acknowledge once again the falseness of your Faith."

"That I have never done; that I can never do."

"Nay! Already you have answered. But a moment ago you adored my daughter above all things, earthly or heavenly. It was for her that you foreswore your vows."

"I have sinned before God; but I still acknowledge Him, and crave His mercy," said the priest wretchedly.

"Hark you, Joseph! You are the best of monks. Have you ever done evil before this night?"

"My life has been clean; but the flesh is weak. It was the witchcraft of Satan in that woman's music. I prayed for strength; but I was powerless. My soul shall pay the penalty."

"What God is this who snares His holiest disciple with the lusts of the flesh?" mocked Abul Malek. "Did not your prayers mount up so high? Or is His power insufficient to forestall the devil? Bah! There is but one true God, and Mohammed is His Prophet. These many years have I labored to rend your veil of holiness asunder, and to expose your faith to ridicule and laughter."

"Stop!" cried the tortured monk. "Bring forth a lance."

"Nay! You shall hear me through," gloated Abul Malek; and Joseph bowed his tanned head, murmuring:

"It is my punishment."

Ringed about thus by his enemies, the priest stood meekly, while the sweat gleamed upon his face; and as the Saracen mocked and jeered at him, he made no answer, save to move his lips in prayer. Had it not have been for this sign they might have thought him changed to stone, so motionless did he stand. How long it lasted no one knew; it may have been an hour; then this unending passive silence roused the anger of the Saracen, who became demoniac in his rage. The others joined in harrying their victim, until the place became a babel; and finally Elzemah, stepping forward, torch in hand, spat upon the giant black robed figure.

The monk's face grew ghastly; but he made no movement. Then in a body the infidels rushed forth to follow the example of Abul Malek's son. They swarmed about the Christian, jeering, cursing, snatching at his garments, until their lord cried:

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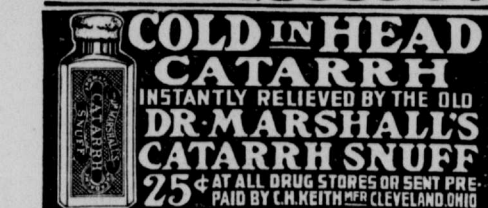
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"Enough! The knave has water in his veins. His blood has soured. Deserted by his God, his frame has withered and his vigor fled."

"Yes," echoed his daughter. "He is great only in bulk. Had he been a Man, I might have loved him; but the evil has fled, leaving nothing but his cassock. Off with his robe, Elzemah. Let us see if aught remains."

With a swift movement, her brother tore at the monk's habit, baring his great bosom; whereat a frightful change swept over the victim. He upheaved his massive shoulders, his gleaming head rose high, and in the glaring light they saw that his face had lost all sweetness and humility; it was the visage of a madman. All the fleshly passion stored through thirty years of cloister life blazed forth, consuming reason and intelligence; and with a sweep of his mighty arms he cleared a space about him, as if his enemies were made of straw. He raised his voice above the clamor, cursing God and men and Moors. As they closed in upon him, out from the hands of a lusty slave he snatched a massive wrought-iron brazier, and whirling it high above his head sent its glowing coals flying into the farthest corners of the room. Then he laid about him right and left, while men fell like grain before the reaper.

"At him!" shouted Abul Malek from his balcony. "Pull down the weapons from the walls. The fool is mad."

The girl clutched at her father's sleeve and pointed to a distant corner, where a tongue of flame was licking the dry wood-work and hangings. Her eyes were flashing, and her lips were parted; she swayed forward, following the priest with eagerness.

"Allah be praised!" she breathed. "He is a Man!"

Elzemah strove to drive his poinard at the monk's bare breast; but the brazier crushed him down. Across the wide floor waged the contest; but the mighty priest was irresistible, and Hassam, seeing that he sought the balcony, flung himself upon the stairs crying to his father and sister to escape. By now, the castle echoed with a frightful din and through it rose a sinister crackling, while the light increased, moment by moment.

Men left the maniac, to battle with the other fury. Some fled to the doors and fought with their clumsy fastenings; but as they flung them back a draught sucked through, changing the place into a raging furnace.

Hassam met the priest, his back against the stairs, hewing at him with his scimitar; but he might as well have essayed to fell an oak with a single blow. Up over his prostrate body rushed the giant, to the balcony where Abul Malek and his daughter stood at bay in the trap of their own manufacture. Then, in the glare of the mounting flames, he sunk his fingers through the Moor's black beard.

The place by now was suffocating. The voice of the conflagration had drowned all other sounds. Men wrapped their robes about their heads and hurled themselves blindly at the doors, fighting with each other, with the licking flames, with the dead that clogged the slippery flags. But the maid remained. She tore at the tattered cassock of the priest, crying into his ear:

"Come! We may yet escape."

He let the writhing Abul Malek slip from out his grasp, and peered at her through the smother.

"Thou knowest me not?" she smiled. "I am Zahra." Her arms entwined his neck for a second time that night; but with a furious cry he raised his hands and smote her down at his feet, then fled back to the stairs and plunged into the billows that roared ahead of the fresh night wind.

The bells of San Sebastian were clanging the alarm; the monks were toiling up the path toward the inferno which lit the heavens, when, black against the glare, they saw a giant figure looming. It came reeling toward them down from the castle of Abul Malek; but not until it was in their very midst did they recognize their brother, Joseph. He was bent and old and singed of body and raiment, and he gibbered foolishly. Long ere they reached the castle, it was but a seething mountain of flame; and in the morning naught remained but heated ruins.

Strange tales were rife concerning the end of Abul Malek and his kin; but the monks could make nothing of them, for no Mussulman cared to speak of what had happened. Nor could Fray Joseph piece the fragments out for them, inasmuch as he lay stricken with a malady which did not leave him for many weeks. Even when he recovered, he did not talk; for though his mind was simple and devout as ever, a kind Providence had blotted out all memory of Zahra, of his sin, and of the temptation that had beset his flesh.

So it is, that even to this day, "The Teeth of the Moor" is a term of mystery to the monks of San Sebastian.



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